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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 65th MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. SENGWE

(Zimbabwe)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and
Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 140: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS (continued)

Support account (A/51/890 and A/51/906)

1. Mr. SIAL (Pakistan) said that the initial support account proposal was not in conformity with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/221 B and noted that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in paragraph 13 of its report (A/51/906), stated that the requirements of that resolution had not been met. He agreed with the Advisory Committee that the proposed level of all resource requirements for the backstopping of peacekeeping operations should have been justified on the basis of consistently applied criteria. Heavy reliance on voluntary contributions, which were unpredictable, could lead to serious difficulties. The Secretary-General should have submitted a full-cost budget and let the General Assembly decide which posts should continue to be financed by means other than assessed contributions.
2. His delegation would welcome additional information on the expenditures to be incurred in providing support services to gratis personnel.
3. Mr. SAHA (India) said that adequate funding must be provided for peacekeeping, which remained an important aspect of United Nations operations; the support account was crucial for that purpose. Such funding should, however, be based on a clear understanding of the needs of peacekeeping activities. There had been a substantial decline in the number of personnel deployed in peacekeeping operations and that tendency was likely to continue. At the same time, there had been a significant, yet unannounced, shift in the nature of requirements for the backstopping of peacekeeping operations. The number of completed peacekeeping missions, as a percentage of the total number of such missions, was at its highest level since 1990. Active peacekeeping was no longer the primary focus. Many recently completed missions had been among the most complex operationally, however, and resources were still needed to wind them up fully. That phenomenon had far-reaching implications.
4. It was obvious that the method of funding adopted prior to 1996 would no longer suffice. His delegation therefore supported the proposal to endorse the funding mechanism provisionally approved in paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 50/221 B.
5. One advantage of the old method of funding had been that it provided a yardstick for judging requests for support account posts. It was unfortunate that the Secretary-General's report gave no justification for the continuation of the 345 such posts authorized in 1996, and little justification for the 20 additional posts currently requested. At the same time, the continuity of 140 gratis personnel was taken for granted, without any assessment of whether they were in fact required. The report did not reflect a dynamic understanding of emerging trends by proposing a measure of restructuring consistent with changes in the focus of peacekeeping activities. That static approach underscored the need for a rigorous annual review, and his delegation looked

forward to any resolution that would contain appropriate language in that regard.

6. His delegation fully supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation to increase the number of posts only in the Claims Unit, reflecting the need to focus on the requirements of the termination phase of peacekeeping. Additional posts in other areas could be considered only in the context of a rigorous justification of all posts, which should be provided in the 1998 report on the support account. His delegation would therefore prefer to limit support account resources to a more realistic figure than that proposed by the Secretary-General.

7. Mr. BOND (United States of America) said that the Secretary-General's report recommended an increase in support account resources and staffing without providing sufficient justification. The proposals in the report could create the impression that jobs which were being suppressed under the regular budget might reappear in the support account. His delegation took issue with the request for a number of posts to deal with backlogs which were the result of mismanagement rather than an increased workload.

8. Many of the non-post requirements outlined in the report lacked any context that might explain the rationale for them. The Advisory Committee's report was also unsatisfactory, in that it did not review the entire scope of the support account. His delegation believed that the Advisory Committee had overstepped its authority in recommending that the Lessons Learned Unit should be abolished; that unit performed a mandated activity of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations which was crucial for promoting and maintaining efficiency in such operations.

9. It was also regrettable that the Advisory Committee had used the opportunity to discuss regular budget issues relating to its own resources. Resource requests for the regular budget were made by the Secretary-General only. Since the Advisory Committee had noted recently that the number of reports on the financing of peacekeeping operations had been substantially reduced, the support account should not have to continue to fund two posts in the Advisory Committee secretariat.

10. Mr. WATANABE (Japan) said that accountability and transparency should be maintained in respect of the support account. Although the United Nations must provide the necessary financial and human resources for the backstopping of peacekeeping operations, care should be taken to reduce its costs whenever possible.

AGENDA ITEM 112: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

Report of the Secretary-General on gratis personnel provided by Governments and other entities (A/51/688 and Corr.1 and Add.1-3 and A/51/813)

11. Mr. MENKVELD (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associate countries of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and supported by Mr. JAREMCZUK (Poland),

expressed appreciation for the updated information provided on the number of gratis personnel, as well as the Secretary-General's proposals aimed at facilitating consultations to establish a uniform policy and comprehensive guidelines for all types of gratis personnel. Since fairly well-established practices already existed for traditional types of gratis personnel, such as interns and technical cooperation experts, such consultations should focus on the categories of gratis personnel outlined in annex II to document A/51/688/Add.2.

12. A distinction must be made between mandated programmes and activities and supplementary activities. For supplementary activities performed by gratis personnel, conditions and procedures did exist, but the requirement that donor Governments and other entities be charged appropriate programme support costs should apply uniformly. A distinction must also be made between mandated programmes for which there were budgeted resources and staffing tables, and mandated programmes and activities for which that was not, or was not yet, the case. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the International Tribunals fell into the latter category. It should be a priority to have all budgets prepared on a full-cost basis, but in the meantime, programme support costs should not be charged for personnel contributed voluntarily for mandated tasks. Moreover, until mandates were implemented on the basis of full-cost budgets, it was not necessary or desirable to limit the extent to which a particular unit could be staffed by gratis personnel or to have the Advisory Committee scrutinize individual cases. The General Assembly should urge the Secretary-General to comply with the request for full-cost budgets for mandated programmes and activities without further delay.

13. The guidelines in document A/51/688/Add.3 provided a useful basis for consultations on comprehensive guidelines for the acceptance of gratis personnel to perform mandated functions. It was essential that the respective obligations of the United Nations, the donor and the individuals concerned should be clearly specified. In the case of urgent requirements for expertise not available within the Organization, or in the start-up phase of new or expanded activities, the Secretary-General should inform all Member States of the possibility of providing gratis personnel on a temporary basis. That could be done by issuing a general questionnaire and specific follow-up requests. The selection procedure should be flexible enough to allow for speedy processing.

14. The Secretary-General's proposals concerning functions were unnecessarily restrictive. With the proper arrangements in place, there was no need to prevent gratis personnel from discharging functions of a supervisory, sensitive or confidential nature.

15. It was appropriate that gratis personnel should normally have the status of "experts on mission" for the purposes of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Length of service should depend on the needs of the Organization and on the availability of gratis personnel. In the start-up phase of new or expanded activities, length of service should normally be limited to the duration of the United Nations recruitment process. On the question of remuneration, insurance, social benefits and pensions, more information on existing arrangements was required.

16. The proposals on performance of service and applicable standards of conduct were basically acceptable. However, the Secretary-General needed to clarify what was meant by "all applicable rules" and to specify what practical measures would be put in place to ensure that obligations were fulfilled. Also, proper arrangements for premature termination of contract, dispute settlement, liability for damages and claims against the United Nations were required.

17. Programme support costs should be levied in the case of supplementary activities but not in that of mandated activities, where voluntary contributions implied a reduction in expenditure levels. A comprehensive analysis should be undertaken of the existing practice of charging a uniform 13 per cent in programme support costs on all voluntary contributions, since it was likely, for instance, that the indirect costs related to voluntary contributions of cash or supplies were lower than those related to personnel. The Secretary-General should review the various aspects of the present system and report to the General Assembly, through the Advisory Committee, on possible adjustments thereto.

18. Mr. ZHANG Wanhai (China) said that the use of Type II gratis personnel had implications for the independence of the international civil service, the personnel policies of Governments, and the management, financing and budgetary procedures of the Organization. As the Secretary-General had said, the acceptance of gratis personnel should not be considered a standard practice. Gratis personnel should be used only on a contingency or emergency basis, in accordance with decisions of the Fifth Committee. He called for the formulation of clearer and more comprehensive guidelines for the use of gratis personnel, as well as for a study of gratis personnel management and financing.

19. Mr. GJESDAL (Norway) called for more uniform and orderly arrangements for the secondment of national personnel and associated himself with the main points of the statement made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the European Union. With regard to proposed guideline 8, Norway agreed with the understanding that gratis personnel should perform their functions under the authority of and in full compliance with the instructions of the Secretary-General, and not those of donor Governments. For that reason, it was unreasonable to require an agreement between the United Nations and donor Governments making those Governments responsible for the conduct and performance of their gratis personnel.

20. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it that the Committee had concluded its general discussion on the question of gratis personnel.

OTHER MATTERS

21. The CHAIRMAN read out a letter addressed to him by the Controller, concerning the report, requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 11 of Section II of its resolution 50/214, on the impact of approved savings measures on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities. The letter noted that, in document A/C.5/50/57/Add.1, the Secretary-General had provided an exhaustive list of activities that would be affected by the required budget reductions. The relevant programme performance report, to be compiled by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, could be undertaken only after the

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biennium was over. The letter further noted that the Controller had requested all programme managers to submit information to him on the impact of the approved savings measures, to supplement the information provided in the Secretary-General's report. While he could not guarantee that that information would be available before the end of the current session, it would be ready by June 1997, as requested in resolution 50/214.

22. Ms. PEÑA (Mexico), supported by Mr. RODRÍGUEZ ABASCAL (Cuba) and Mr. MOKTEFI (Algeria), said that while the Controller's letter referred to a list of activities that would be affected by savings measures, no mention was made of the analytical study of the impact of such measures on the relevant programmes and activities that had been requested in General Assembly resolution 50/214. Moreover, while the Office of Internal Oversight Services was indeed responsible for preparing the normal performance report for the biennium, the report currently requested was of a very different and more urgent nature and must be prepared by the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management. The urgency with which delegations viewed the request in General Assembly resolution 50/214 was reflected in the fact that the request had been reiterated in General Assembly resolution 51/221. While she regretted that so much time had passed since the original request was made, she expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's forthcoming efforts to comply with the request.

23. The CHAIRMAN announced that, since he had received a new assignment from his Government, he would be unable to complete his term as Chairman of the Committee.

24. An exchange of courtesies took place, in which Mr. AHOUNOU (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. SIAL (Pakistan), Mr. ZBOGAR (Slovenia), Ms. SEALY MONTEITH (Jamaica) and Ms. DAES (Greece), on behalf of the various regional groups, and Mr. STEIN (Vice-Chairman) paid tribute to the Chairman.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.